

# Petals of Blood

## Chapter Thirteen

*[The final chapter]*

### 1

Inspector Godfrey sat by the window of a first-class coach and watched the fields roll away: neat, man-controlled beauty of coffee and tea plantations on hillsides and valleys and ridges. His mind was not wholly on the undulating landscape between Ruwa-ini and Nairobi, but was still in New Ilmorog. He should now have been experiencing that inner satisfaction he always felt whenever he put a crime jigsaw puzzle together: but instead he felt an inner discomfort, a slight irritability. He was a little surprised at himself because this kind of unease was hopelessly out of character with the equanimity with which he was wont to view the flow of social and political events. Not that he was interested in the likes of Karega. For such destroyers of order he had no feelings. Inspector Godfrey, a self-made man, for his formal education had not taken him beyond Form 2 and yet see where he was, the heights he had reached through study, application and through an instinctive fear of stirring the bottom of the pool. He had been brought up to believe in the sanctity of private property. The system of private ownership, of means of production, exchange and distribution, was for him synonymous with the natural order of things like the sun, the moon and the stars which seemed fixed and permanent in the firmament. Anybody who interfered with that ordained fixity and permanence of things was himself unnatural and deserved no mercy: was he not inviting chaos such as would occur if some foolish astronaut/cosmonaut should go and push the sun or moon from its place? People like Karega with their radical trade unionism and communism threatened the very structure of capitalism: as such they were worse than murderers. Inspector Godfrey always felt a certain protective relationship to this society. It did not matter that for him, all these years, he had acquired very little. Still he felt a lordly proprietorial air to the structure: was the police not the force that guaranteed that stability which alone made possible the unhindered accumulation of wealth? Everybody, even those millionaires that had ganged together under Kamwene Cultural Organisation, really owed their position

to the force. The police force was truly the maker of modern Kenya, he had always felt. The Karegas and their like should really be deported to Tanzania and China!

But it was people like Munira who really disturbed him. How could Munira have repudiated his father's immense property? Could property, wealth, status, religion, plus education not hold a family together? Inspector Godfrey decided that it was religious fanaticism! Yet from his own experience in the police force, such fanaticism was normally found among the poor. Human beings: they could never be satisfied.

And yet there was a way in which Munira was right. This system of capitalism and capitalistic democracy needed moral purity if it was going to survive. The skeletons that he himself had come across in New Ilmorog could not very well come under the label of moral purity. Of course he had seen similar or near similar things in Nairobi, Mombasa, Malindi, Watamu and other places but he had never before come across a Munira who was prepared to murder in the name of moral purity. And it was not Wanja's *Sunshine Lodge* that Inspector Godfrey was thinking about. It was, for instance, the Utamaduni Cultural Tourist Centre at Ilmorog. Ostensibly it was there to entertain Watalii from USA, Japan, West Germany, and other parts of Western Europe. But this only camouflaged other more sinister activities: smuggling of gemstones and ivory plus animal and even human skins. It was a centre for the plunder of the country's natural and human assets. Women, young girls, were being recruited to satisfy any watalii's physical whims. The more promising ones, those who seemed to acquire an air of sophistication with a smattering of English and German were lured to Europe as slave whores from Africa! Inspector Godfrey was in no doubt that this lucrative trade in Black Ivory was done with the knowledge of Nderi wa Riera, the MP for the area, for did he not own the centre? He was in partnership with the proprietor, the man from West Germany. Black Ivory for Export: First rate Foreign Exchange Earner: but couldn't we do without it, Inspector Godfrey thought, recalling the storm that had burst out when years before a similar trafficking in young flesh had been discovered at Watamu Bay? Maybe he would talk to his superiors about this: maybe he would give them the separate reports that he had made. But then remembering how many VIP's might be connected with such an Utalii Utamaduni Centre, he desisted. He would keep the report and the knowledge to himself. It might come in useful should he ever be called upon to put together another criminal jigsaw puzzle. He was a crime detective not the leader of a moral vice squad! Tourism was after all one of the biggest industries in the country and there was nothing good that did not carry with it a few negative things. His duty as a policeman was to help maintain stability, law and order, upon which depended the successful growth of all the industries and foreign investments. He chuckled to himself. He felt better. How silly of him to have let himself be drawn into moral questions of how and why! Was he growing weak with old age? He

settled back in the carriage and his mind dwelt at the more comfortable formal questions of his investigation of the murder by arson of Kimeira, Chui and Mzigo. Wanja, Munira, Abdulla and even Karega passed through his mind... as the train took him nearer and nearer the city of which New Ilmorog was only a tiny, tiny imitation...

## 2

She thought about her father: what was it that made some take the side of the people in a struggle and others sell out to foreign interests while still others stood precariously on the fence? What was it? And recalling Abdulla, Karega, Munira, her grandfather and all the other individuals who had been in and out of her life, she decided that maybe everything was simply a matter of love and hate. Love and hate – Siamese twins – back to back in a human heart. Because you loved you also hated: and because you hated you also loved. What you loved decided what you would have to hate in relation to what you loved. What you hated decided the possibilities of what you could love in relation to what you hated. And how did one know what one loved and hated? Again, thinking of the events in her life, she came back to the question of choice. You knew what you loved and what you hated by what you did, what actions, what side you had chosen. You could not, for instance, work with the colonists in suppressing the people and still say you loved the people. You could not stand on the fence in a struggle and still say you were on the side of those fighting the evil. Her father had wanted to make money and to accumulate property: he had chosen neutrality, and he hated any suggestion of being involved on the side of the people in case this ruined his chances of making money. The tragedy of her father, who by his neutrality had therefore chosen the side of the colonists, was that despite his selling out, despite his denial of self and of his father, he had ended up ruined anyway, the world disintegrating around him. His petty trade as a plumber was no match for the giant enterprises around him. She could see this clearly because of her own involvement in the petty transport trade and she knew what pressures were brought upon the petty trader, the matatu driver, the owner of one bus, the shopkeeper – all these and more. So what was the difference between her position and that of her father? Had she not, like her father before her, also chosen her side in the struggle because she had latterly opted for her thing to love: money and money-making? She had chosen, then, the side of the Kimerias of post-independence Kenya: how could she then blame her father? She now wishes she had really known him: she wished she had talked with him at some length! But what could they have spoken about? Had she not, after all, added to his humiliation? It could not now be helped. But was there a time when she maybe could have helped it? She thought of her many attempts to return home and all the failures. There was the time she packed all her things and told the other girls that

she was definitely quitting the life. The following day she found all her clothes stolen. She became scared of going home empty-handed. There was the time her father called her a prostitute and, in word if not in deed, had chased her out of the house! There was the time the lawyer had asked her to return home. She would have done it. She had taken the bus, determined to go back home. But on reaching her place, she had suddenly changed her mind. She had been stabbed with guilt, not only because of her being empty-handed, but because of the memory of her very last encounter with her father. The memory wounded... it still hurt. She had, before her first visit to Ilmorog, decided to make it up with her parents and seek their blessing: who knows the effect of the power of the parental curse? She had reasoned. She had gone home at midday and found him lying on the grass under the barn. She saw from his emaciated face that he was very ill; she suddenly felt kindly toward him. He was all alone. He spoke to her with difficulty. He asked her for water. She went to the house and poured some water into a cup and took it to him. His hands trembled. He looked up at her. Then he slowly shook his head. 'You look exactly like your mother when she was young,' he said, and his voice was soft. Maybe, she had thought, maybe he was remembering a time when it was possible to love. And indeed in that second she too remembered the time when she used to sit on her father's knees and he would sing to her. It was a brilliant sunny spot in her childhood before he became obsessed with the idea of making money. Her heart mellowed toward him. She wanted to confess all her feelings and ask for forgiveness. He looked at her again. He said: 'Have you any money? Five shillings? Twenty shillings?' She picked up her handbag. She saw him suddenly beam bright on his face, his emaciated hands were trembling with eagerness. He started praising her in a most exaggerated tone, saying that he knew all the time she would later be his blessing in his old age. He complained to her how her mother treated him, cheating him out of his money. And not just his mother: it seemed as if all the neighbourhood had ganged up to deny him his share of the money in Kenya. Only Wanjia was left. And suddenly her hands became frozen in the very act of pulling out a note. So only money, no matter how it was got, could redeem her in his eyes? And she had thought... She could not buy his love or his blessings or buy her way back to the home with money. She said: 'I have nothing!' and she shut the handbag. Then he started condemning everybody: he had known that all his children were useless... She walked away, went to the nearest bar and wept and drank all the money she had. Later she heard the news of his death and she did not cry. He had died of cancer.

She rested on her bed in the old hut, turning over these things in her head... these silhouettes from the past... these images that refused to be burnt right out of her life and memory. She wanted a new life... clean... she felt this was the meaning of her recent escape! Already she felt the stirrings of a new person... she had after all

been baptised by fire. And to think that it was Munira and Abdulla who were instrumental in her double narrow escapes, in her getting yet another chance to try our new paths, new possibilities? Yet would there now be any better chance for her? Whatever would happen to her she would always shiver at the horror of that moment... she still wondered how or from where she could have got the strength to do what she had done...

Somebody knocked at the door. Who could it be? There was another knock, then the door opened and –

‘Mother!’ Wanja gasped.

‘My child... fire again!’ her now aged mother cried out. They wept together maybe both weeping out their different memories.

‘A whole month, and I did not know. I heard about it only the other day and that from a mere stranger!’

And she explained how an acquaintance had asked after Wanja’s health, whether she had recovered from the fire. And Wanja’s mother had felt very weak at the knees and she was only able to stand and walk because of her faith in the mercy and infinite justice of Christ.

For the next few weeks they just talked, softly, treading toward the past, but never quite bringing it into the open. The only thing they discussed at length was their refusal to go to Tea. Wanja was thinking: maybe nobody could really escape his fate. Maybe life was a series of false starts, which, once discovered, called for more renewed efforts at yet another beginning. Suddenly, she could no longer keep her fears and hopes from the older woman:

‘I think... I am... I think I am with child. No, I am sure of it, mother.’

Her mother was silent for a few seconds.

‘Whose... whose child?’

Wanja got a piece of charcoal and a piece of cardboard. For one hour or so she remained completely absorbed in her sketching. And suddenly she lifted out of her own self, she felt waves of emotion she had never before experienced. The figure began to take shape on the board. It was a combination of the sculpture she once saw at the lawyer’s place in Nairobi and images of Kimathi in his moments of triumph and laughter and sorrow and terror – but without one limb. When it was over, she felt a tremendous calm, a kind of inner assurance of the possibilities of a new kind of power. She handed the picture to her mother.

‘Who... who is this... with so much pain and suffering on his face? And why is he laughing at the same time?’

### 3

Abdulla and Joseph sat outside their hovel in the New Jerusalem, talking. Joseph was now a tall youth in a neat uniform of khaki shirt and shorts. He held Sembene Ousmane’s novel, *God’s Bits of Wood*, in his hands but he was not reading much. The sun was brilliantly warm over Ilmorog but it also made the smell of urine and rotting garbage waft through the air to where they sat. But they were used to the smells. Joseph was saying that he was confident of passing his exams. He would have like to go to another school for his Higher Certificate but this was not possible because he had not applied to move. Abdulla’s mind was elsewhere. He was glad he had saved Wanja. But he still did not know what to make of the experience. So Munira was capable of such an act? He did not know whether to admire or to be angry with him: to loath his sneaking cowardice or to praise his courage. After all, he had carried out what he, Abdulla, had contemplated doing without ever bringing himself to do it. Joseph was still chattering:

‘It’s very strange,’ he said. ‘It’s very strange that Chui was killed at the time he was killed.’

‘Why?’ asked Abdulla perfunctorily. But he was jolted by Joseph’s reply.

‘Because the students were planning another strike.’

‘Another strike? Why?’

‘Chui ran the school from golf clubs and the board-rooms of the various companies of which he was the director, or else from his numerous wheatfields in the Rift Valley. The junior staff – the workers on the school compound – were going to join us. And one or two teachers were sympathetic. They too had grievances, about pay and conditions of work and Chui’s neglect... This time we were going to demand that the school should be run by a committee of students, staff and workers... But even now we are determined to put to an end the whole prefect system... And that all our studies should be related to the liberation of our people...’

Abdulla lost interest in Joseph’s catalogue of ills at Siriana. He was reviewing his own life. He recalled his own childhood at Kinyogori, remembering the many elders, men and women who used to come and talk long into the night. Ngang’s was Riunge. Johanna Kiraka. Naftali Michuki. Ziporah Ndiri. True patriots of Kenya. They would talk and whisper long into the night, reviewing the history of Limuru, denouncing those who had sold out to the white foreign interests like Luka, but praising those who had stood up and fought against settler encroachment. They

talked about how in years to come all the land in the area would be returned to all the mbari wa Limuru, the children of the soil. KCA KAU. They talked about all this and they would end up singing songs of hope and songs of struggle. How Abdulla had loved those songs. How they had moved him to heights of glory to come! He saw Nding'uri, he reviewed his own narrow escape, his flight to the forest, his arrest and detention, his return home to loss and to a kind of gain. And suddenly Abdulla felt he should tell Joseph the truth about his past. He felt guilty when he remembered how he used to curse at Joseph, taking out his frustrations on the little one, and the little one bearing it, thinking that maybe it came from his returned brother. It was strange how Joseph had never asked him about 'their' parents and, except for his delirium during the journey to the city, never referred to this childhood. Maybe he knew the truth. Maybe...

'Joseph,' Abdulla suddenly said, as if he had not heard about the strike in Siriana. 'If I have treated you wrong in the past, forgive me.'

'Why?' There's nothing to forgive,' Joseph replied, struck by Abdulla's sudden change of subject and tone. 'I am very grateful for what you have done for me. And also Munira and Wanja and Karega. When I grow up and finish school and university I want to be like you: I would like to feel proud that I had done something for our people. You fought for the political independence of this country: I would like to contribute to the liberation of the people of this country. I have been reading a lot about Mau Mau: I hope that one day we shall make Karuna-ini, where Kimathi was born, and Othaya, where J.M was born, national shrines. And build a theatre in memory of Kimathi, because as a teacher he organised the Gichamu Theatre Movement in Tetu... I have been reading a lot about what the workers and peasants of other lands have done in history. I have read about the people's revolutions in China, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Angola, Guinea, Mozambique... Oh yes, and the works of Lenin and Mao...'

He was talking like Karega, Abdulla thought, but he did not say anything. Maybe... maybe, he thought, history was a dance in a huge arena of God. You played your part, whatever your chosen part, and then you left the arena, swept aside by the waves of a new step, a new movement in the dance. Other dancers, younger, brighter, more inventive came and played with even greater skill, with more complicated footwork, before they too were swept aside by yet a greater tide in the movement they had helped to create, and other dancers were thrown up to carry the dance to even newer heights and possibilities undreamt of by an earlier generation. Let it be... Let it be... His time was over. He was fated by the present circumstances to remain a petty fruit-seller on the verge of ruin. But he was glad that he had saved a life when he was on a mission of taking one, and he would be happy to know that Wanja was happy and that sometimes she remembered him.

Just before the trial, Munira's father and mother and his wife, accompanied by Rev. Jerrod, came to see him. They all found it difficult to hit on an appropriate subject of conversation. Munira looked at his tall father who, despite having traversed Kenya's colonial history – he was more than 75 years old – was still very strong and healthy. What did he really think of this world? He who had seen the pre-colonial, feudal clan-heads and houses decline and fall; who had witnessed the coming of missionaries; of the railway; the first and second war; the Mau-Mau upheavals; the post-Independence trials – the murders of Pinto, Mboya, Kungu Karumba, J.M., the detention of Shikuku, Seroney, oathings to protect properties – all this: what did he think of it? Munira inquired about his brothers and his sisters and it was as if they were not blood relations at all, so remote and removed they seemed to be from the present circumstances:

'And where are the children?' he asked. They looked embarrassed. Munira frowned in anger. He snorted: 'You don't want them to see their father, a failure, eeh?' And suddenly his mother broke down.

'Why did you do it? How could you do such a thing?' she asked. She had broken the taboo of silence on the subject. Rev. Jerrod chimed in:

'And to know you were here all the time and I didn't... I might have helped.'

Munira more than ever was struck by the hypocritical stances around him. He recalled the forthrightness of Inspector Godfrey, who at least was clear as to what laws he was serving, and he felt kindly toward the detective and his eccentric ways of investigating crimes.

'Return to the path... turn to the Light...' Munira intoned, standing above them, suddenly filled with pity and anger at the same time. The others looked at one another, except Waweru, who stood apart and seemed far away in his own past.

'You, my father – ' Munira called with authority.

'Yes?'

'One question, only one question I want to ask you. Do you remember that in 1953 you refused to take the Mau Mau oath for African Land and Freedom?'

'What has that got to do with your -' and Waweru pulled himself up short, wondering about the new Temptations of Satan.

'And yet in 196-, after Independence, you took an oath to divide the Kenya people and to protect the wealth in the hands of only a few. What was the difference? Was



an oath not an oath? Kneel down, old man, and ask the forgiveness of Christ. In heaven, in the eyes of God, there are no poor, or rich, this or that tribe, all who have repented are equal in his eyes. You too, Reverend -'

'What has he got into his head?' his mother cried out again, frightened.

'You remember that once in the Blue Hills you received some people from Ilmorog -'

'I can't quite, eeh, remember -' he said, wondering what was to follow.

'A cripple among them? Drought?'

'Yes... aah... yes'

'I was one of them: and you sent us away thirsty and hungry.'

'I didn't know... If I had known... but...'

Munira coughed once. He cleared his throat and then dramatically pointed a finger at them:

'The Law... Did you obey the Law of the one God?... Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison, and you did not visit me. Then they also will answer, Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee? Then will he answer them: Truly I say unto you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

They went away weeping for him. At the Ilmorog Anglican Church they knelt down and all of them said prayers for Munira.

'It is these revivalist cults that claim to speak in tongues and to work miracles. Going too far... They must be banned...' said Rev. Jerrod, sadly.

'Yes...' agreed Munira's father. But he was thinking about Karega and Mariamu and how it was the woman who had, through her sons, hit twice at him. Maybe... it was his sin of attempted adultery... weakness of the flesh... But how could this be, seeing that he had not quite... and in any case he had repented? Then he recalled a recent coincidence. Kajohi, who had sold him all of the Kagunda Mbari land in the 1920s and disappeared into the Rift Valley, had now come back, an old man half blind, to ask for assistance. Mr Ezekeil Waweru had, through his contacts and friends, found him a place at an almshouse run by the church in the city... God

works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform, Ezekiel muttered. He would know now how to write his will... how could he then question God's wisdom?

## 5

Karega received the news and his face did not move. But despite attempts to control and contain himself, a teardrop flowed down his left cheek. He watched the drop fall to the cement floor. He was weak in body because of the early beatings, the electric shocks and the mental harassment. These, he could bear. But to hear that his mother was dead – dead! That he would never see her again... that he had never really done anything for her... that she had remained a landless squatter all her life: on European farms, on Munira's father's fields, and latterly a landless rural worker for anybody who would give her something with which to hold the skin together! 'Why? Why?' he moaned inside. 'I have failed,' and he felt another teardrop fall to the cement floor. Then suddenly he hit the cell wall in a futile gesture of protest. What of all the Mariamus of Kenya, of neo-colonial Africa? What of all the women and men and children still weighed down by Imperialism? And for two days he would not eat anything.

On the third day the warder who had broken the bad news came again.

'Mr Karega... there's a visitor for you... you had better come out... Mr Karega, I... we want you to know that despite what has happened... some of us are glad to know of your struggle for us workers... we feel with you... only that we endure because, we must eat...'

For us workers – Karega repeated in his heart. His mother had worked all her life breaking the skin of the earth for a propertied few: what difference did it make if they were black or brown? Their capacity to drink the blood and sweat of the many was not diminished by any thoughts of kinship of skin or language or region! Although she insisted on her immediate rights, she never complained much believing that maybe God would later put everything right. But she had now died without God putting anything right. She had got no more than what she had struggled and fought for. Could Wanja have been right: eat or you are eaten?

He saw the girl from a distance and wondered who she was. As he approached the barbed wire, her face seemed vaguely familiar. Then he remembered that he had seen her at the factory: she looked after the seed millet for making Theng'eta – she spread it out to the sun to dry, and things like that. She looked shy and she spoke Swahili.

'I have been sent to you. I have been begging to be allowed to see you. The warder helped me.'

‘What is your name?’

‘Akinyi. They sent me-’

‘Who?’

‘The other workers... with a message. They are with you... and they are... we are planning another strike and a march through Ilmorog.’

‘But who-?’

‘The movement of Ilmorog workers... not just the union of workers at the breweries. All workers at Ilmorog and the unemployed will join us. And the small farmers... and even some small traders...’

He stood still... so still. The movement of workers... it must be something new... something which must have started since he was held.

She told him more about the workers’ protest and rebellion on the Sunday he was arrested and also about the condition of the workers wounded then. She told him about the death of a very important person in authority...

‘Really?’ he asked.

‘Yes. In Nairobi. He was gunned down as he waited in his car in Eastleigh, outside Mathare Valley. He was waiting for his chauffeur-bodyguard to bring him the rent...’

‘He profited on the misery of the poor. It was probably robbers who did it, but all the same-’

Not robbers. According to Ruma Mongait’s more than that. They left a note. They called themselves Wakombozi – or the society of one world liberation... and they say it’s Stanley Mathenge returned from Ethiopia to complete the war he and Kimathi started... There are rumours about a return to the forests and the mountains...’

Mathenge back? He turned this over in his mind. It could not be possible. But what did it matter? New Mathenges... new Koitalels... new Kimathis... new Piny Owachos... these were born every day among the people...

‘What are they going to do to you?’ she said, interrupting his thought-flow.

‘Detain me... I am suspected of being a communist at heart.’

‘You’ll come back,’ she suddenly said, looking up at him boldly.

Her voice only agitated further images set in motion by her revelation. Imperialism: capitalism: landlords: earthworms. A system that bred hordes of round-bellied jiggers and bedbugs with parasitism and cannibalism as the highest goals in society. This system and its profiteering gods and its ministering angels had hounded his mother to her grave. These parasites would always demand the sacrifice of blood from the working masses. These few who had prostituted the whole land turning it over to foreigners for thorough exploitation, would drink people's blood and say hypocritical prayers of devotion to skin oneness and to nationalism even as skeletons of bones walked to lonely graves. The system and its gods and its angels had to be fought consciously, consistently and resolutely by all the working people! From Koitalel through Kang'ethe to Kimathi it had been the peasants, aided by the workers, small traders and small landowners who had mapped out the path. Tomorrow it would be the workers and the peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system of all its preying bloodthirsty gods and gnomish angels, bringing to an end the reign of the few over the many and the era of drinking blood and feasting on human flesh. Then, only then, would the kingdom of man and woman really begin, they joying and loving in creative labour... For a minute he was so carried on the waves of his vision and of the possibilities it opened up for all the Kenyan working and peasant masses that he forgot the woman beside him.

'You'll come back,' she said again in a quiet affirmation of faith in eventual triumph.

He looked hard at her, then past her to Mukami of Manguo Marxhes and again back to Nyakinyua, his mother, and even beyond Akinyi to the future! And he smiled through his sorrow.

'Tomorrow... tomorrow...' he murmured to himself.

'Tomorrow...' and he knew he was no longer alone.

*Evanston – Limuru – Yalta  
October 1970 – October 1975*

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**Course: African Revolutionary Writing**

**20062, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood, 1977**

5482 words